

## **Compatibility Determination**

**Use:** Schultz-Hanford Area Transmission Line Project and associated minor modification of existing right-of-way

**Refuge Name:** Columbia National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)

**County:** Adams, Washington; Grant, Washington

### **Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:**

Public Land Order 243, September 6, 1944

Migratory Bird Conservation Act, as amended [16 USC 715- 715r]

Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act of 1934 [16 USC 718- 718h; 48 Stat. 451]

Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, as amended [16 USC 742a- 742j; 70 Stat. 1119]

### **Refuge Purpose(s):**

For withdrawn lands - "... as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife ..." Public Land Order 243, dated Sept. 6, 1944.

"...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." 16 U.S.C. § 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act)

### **National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:**

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is "...to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans" (National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended [16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee]).

### **Description of Use(s):**

The proposed Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) project would add 150' width to an existing 100' wide and half mile long right-of-way (ROW) and construct a new transmission line in Central Washington to increase transmission system capacity north of Hanford. Construction would include placement of two flat 500-kilovolt single-circuit steel towers on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) land, adjacent to towers on an existing parallel line (also on USFWS land.) The additional ROW would exclude the construction or placement of any buildings, and is considered a minor expansion because the existing roads and juxtaposed corridor will be used for access, and new towers will be lined up with existing towers. Sandy and rocky substrates in the ROW should restrict impacts mostly to the "footprints" of the two towers.

A description of the entire project under consideration for this determination can be found in the following document and is incorporated by reference: *Schultz-Hanford Area Transmission Line Project, Final Environmental Impact Statement, DOE/EIS-0325, January 2003 (FEIS)*. This Compatibility Determination is an appendix to the FEIS.

Construction and ROW for the power line would occur on the west side of an isolated parcel of

USPWS land near the confluence of Crab Creek and the Columbia River near Schwana in Grant County, Washington. The location is in Section 2, T15N, R23E (see maps attached.)

Construction is projected for 2004. Annual maintenance visits would likely occur during the spring when noxious weed control might be needed.

The construction portion of this project would include the use of ground vehicles and equipment to erect power line footings and legs. Helicopters would be used to move and place towers that were pre-constructed off-site. An existing operation and maintenance road would be improved to allow vehicle access.

This power line location was selected as the least environment-damaging route among six considered. It is adjacent to another power line which uses the same access roads and right-of-way. Bonneville Power Administration is responsible for providing uninterrupted power to meet demand across the region, and this line would eliminate a bottleneck and increase reliability during high demand periods.

#### **Availability of Resources:**

Compensation was received from BP A for the entire planning process to help determine compatibility. Annual inspection and treatment of invasive species in the right-of-way is addressed as a stipulation necessary to ensure compatibility.

Weed control would utilize a refuge truck and A TV spray equipment, using one or two staff days and herbicide. Monitoring would be accomplished during these annual visits. BP A funds would be transferred to the USPWS, Columbia NWR for these weed-related compliance activities, including preparation of a Pesticide Use Proposal required by USPWS if herbicides are needed. Ultimately, after native plant species are re-established, minimal refuge resources would be required and could be completed within existing operating budgets.

#### **Anticipated Impacts of the Use(s):**

Cumulative and long-term impacts would be negligible due to measures adopted as stipulations necessary to ensure compatibility. Short-term and long-term impacts are listed below. BP A has completed cultural resources review, and tower sites and access roads are located outside cultural resource boundaries (4.10.3 FEIS.) A description of the entire project under consideration can be found in the FEIS.

- Short-term soil disturbance would occur during construction phase from use of vehicles and equipment where the towers will be installed.
- There would be noise associated with construction, including equipment and helicopter used to place tower on legs and to stretch conductor, that is short-term.
- Vegetation removal at tower sites, and trampling or crushing during construction phase next to tower sites and along spur access roads, would be a short-term impact.
- Addition of towers and horizontally-oriented parallel conductor lines, high tension ground line, and fiber optic cable that add a potential bird-strike hazard would be a permanent, long-term impact.

**Public Review and Comment:**

The public review and comment period began September 26, 2002 and ended October 10, 2002. The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

1. Posted notice at Columbia NWR headquarters, Royal City PO, and Othello PO.
2. Public notice on September 26, 2002 in the following newspapers: Columbia Basin Herald, Othello Outlook, Royal Review.

There were no comments from the public.

Following the above public comment period, Columbia NWR adopted the BPA's FEIS. The FEIS documents public comments received by BP A and responses they provided. BP A's Record of Decision will be issued no sooner than 30 days following publication notice in the Federal Register for the FEIS. Our Record of Decision will be issued after the BPA's Record of Decision has been signed.

**Determination:** (check one below)

☐ Use is Not Compatible

☒ Use is Compatible With Following Stipulations

**Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:**

In accordance with 603 FW 2.11 (D) for minor modifications of existing rights-of-way, and to avoid resource impacts and ensure no net loss of habitat quantity and quality, BP A will implement the following: 1) Stipulations listed below, and referenced in Chapters 5.5.1.4 and 5.20.4 and Appendix L of the FEIS dated January 2003, will be reflected unchanged in the BPA Record of Decision and will be reflected in our Record of Decision; 2) road access is closed (if necessary with construction of new gate and fence) to prevent unauthorized vehicle trespass to proposed and existing right-of-way; 3) helicopter installation of towers is used to avoid the need for heavy and wide-tracked ground equipment on sensitive soils and vegetation; 4) tower design is changed from delta to flat configuration, which places all transmission wires lower and on a single horizontal plane; 5) bird diverters are added to the overhead ground-wires and fiber optic cable to help deter bird strikes; 6) road width is reduced to approximately 101 which will protect native vegetation and reduce the area requiring annual weed control; 7) noxious weed control is included as a requirement of the right-of-way expansion and includes the existing right-of-way, which we will monitor; 8) vehicle inspection and weed removal will occur for all BP A employees, contractors, and their agents before entering refuge lands; 9) re-vegetation of construction site will occur using adapted native plant species; 10) a pre-construction meeting will occur between the BPA project inspector and contractor(s) and the Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that these requirements are understood.

This Compatibility Determination will become effective on the date the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Record of Decision is signed and made available to, the affected public.

**Justification:**

Changes following review of the Draft EIS eliminated incompatible portions of the original project, and are documented in letters appended to this Determination of Compatibility from BPA Project Manager Lou Driessen to CNWR Project Leader Bob Flores on 7/18/02 and 8/27/2002. These include stipulations 3-6 above. Although there will be minor short-term impacts, the measures implemented to ensure compatibility that include re-vegetation with native species, noxious weed control and access restrictions, should actually improve habitat quality above the current condition. This proposal supports the Refuge purposes, National Wildlife Refuge System mission, and mandate to ensure biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health.

**Mandatory Re-Evaluation Date:** (provide month and year for "allowed" uses only)

\_\_\_\_\_ Mandatory 15-year Re-Evaluation Date (for priority public uses)

December 2012 Mandatory 10-year Re-Evaluation Date (for all uses other than priority public uses)

NEPA Compliance for Refuge Use Decision: (check one below)

\_\_\_ Categorical Exclusion without Environmental Action Statement

\_\_\_ Categorical Exclusion and Environmental Action Statement

\_\_\_ Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

X Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

**References Cited:**

Schultz-Hanford Area Transmission Line Project, Draft Environmental Impact Statement, DOE/EIS-0325, February 2002.

Schultz-Hanford Area Transmission Line Project, Final Environmental Impact Statement, DOE/EIS-0325, January 2003.

Letter of 7/18/02 from Lou Driessen, BP A Project Manager, to Bob Flores, Columbia NWR Project Leader (attached).

Letter of 8/27/02 from Lou Driessen, BPA Project Manager, to Bob Flores,) Columbia NWR Project Leader (attached).

Memo to USFWS Regional Director Anne Badgley from Columbia NWR Project Leader Robert Flores: NEP A compliance for Schultz-Hanford Area Transmission Line Project- Adoption of Final Environmental Impact Statement, December 2002.

**Refuge Determination:**

Prepared by:

Randy Hill  
(Signature)

12/19/02  
(Date)

Refuge Manager/  
Project Leader  
Approval:

[Signature]  
(Signature)

12/19/02  
(Date)

**Concurrence:**

*acting*

Refuge Supervisor:

[Signature]  
(Signature)

12/23/02  
(Date)

Regional Chief,  
National Wildlife  
Refuge System:

*Acting*

*Acting*

[Signature]  
(Signature)

12/23/02  
(Date)